
6-15-1994

Towards the True Country

D. Iarll Powell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle>

Recommended Citation

Powell, D. Iarll (1994) "*Towards the True Country*," *The Mythic Circle*: Vol. 1994 : Iss. 17 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle/vol1994/iss17/19>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Mythic Circle by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Additional Keywords

Fiction; Towards the True Country; D. Iarll Powell

TOWARDS THE TRUE COUNTRY

by D. Iarll Powell

So I'll tell you then, if you really want to know, why I've undergone such a radical change these last few months. I'll tell you because you expressed the desire to know, and this is a desire, if you're anything like the man you once were, that will be met with a satiation beyond your dreams. I'll tell you because you're the one who early on in my life instilled in me a love of certain books, and thus a longing for certain forms of experience. I will tell you because you are my brother, and such bonds are coming to mean much more to me than they once did. And I'll tell you because maybe in the telling I'll draw that much closer to the achievement of my heart's desire. First of all, forgive me if the language of this story is overly ornate, florid, or treacly sweet. I tried telling it in the plainer words, and I found they captured nothing close to the flavor of my experience.

I will tell you of the last time I met them, and not of my previous encounters, or of all the false leads between these encounters. I felt this will be sufficient to answer your questions, for that last encounter was the only time I had any direct dealings with them, and all my deductions and theories of their nature were confirmed. They also revealed their opinion of me—an opinion I now share, and probably shared even that night.

That night was what changed me. It made me into what I am today, and will help me to continue to grow towards the kind of human being I should be; will help me cross over the border and into the homeland. And no, I'm not speaking metaphorically.

It was at one of Peter Simmons' parties that I saw them for the last time. The funny thing is I hadn't even planned on going. Peter called me up that afternoon and practically begged me to go. I told him no, that I had other things to do. I really had nothing other to do than get drunk, watch two hours of imbecility on the television, and nurse my obsession.

But then he mentioned, in an offhanded manner, not knowing the connection, that my obsession would be attending the party.

William and Clarice Smith—it was quite a coup for a small museum fund-raiser. They were young, rich and beautiful. They invited endless speculation and gossip because they just seemed to have appeared on the scene six months ago. Their past was shrouded in mystery, and there was no documented history of their social climb. This in no way seemed to bother the society scene, or the people who covered this strange, perverse breed. I was the only one who knew where they came from, and I had solutions to most of the mysteries. But I was an aberration and no one else had a clue.

I did a quick about-face and told Peter that I would come to the party after all. Peter probably felt that it was

solely for the status of interacting with the Smiths, and he would've been right in a weird way. He asked me if I would be bringing a date or coming stag. I said I'd try to hunt one up and that was the end of the conversation.

I went alone. Much of my life I've been solitary by nature. I feared intimacy like a plague. Any such relationships I've had have been few and far between, and more mutually destructive than anything resembling nurturing. Hopefully that has changed.

Not only was I alone when I went to the party, I was also rather drunk. I had a small spaghetti stain on my tie that I hoped no one would notice.

The party was held at Peter and Lisa's place. It's actually a bit bigger than the museum. It's a nice Santa Fe style place; just my brand of pretension.

I showed the doorman my press pass, which enabled me to get in free. Thankfully, he didn't ask what paper I worked for.

I hoped that night the confrontation would take place. I hoped that my two friends would speak with me and admit what they were and where they were from. I hoped that I would never see this apartment again.

Peter's place was packed. In the backyard a live band played mellow rhythm and blues, and couples danced lazily under blue and yellow party lights. The band sounded proficient enough after I finished my second drink at the party, which was my fifth of the evening.

There was no sign of the ones who had named themselves William and Clarice Smith. I stood on the edge of the pro-tem dance floor, and nursed my third rum and coke. I had no eyes for the dancer, and the music was distant from me, barely discernible. I stared at this gazebo Peter had in the corner of his yard. I thought: what a small, petty beauty, how pale and insubstantial such things must be, to two who have walked and seen what they've seen.

A man cleared his throat next to me. It was Alex Winston, the physics professor at the city college. He has since gone on sabbatical.

He is a brilliant man by all accounts. I've heard people who've taken classes of his say he's a gifted, articulate teacher. In person, though, he's tall and pale and you see clearly on his face the remnants of an acne-tortured youth. He's gangly, awkward and pained. All this was multiplied in effect by the fact that his wife had died recently. So the tortured expression I saw on his face when I turned to greet him was understandable.

So, Winston was the last person I wanted to talk to at the time. I was in the grip of my obsession, and I had no time for his awkwardness, or his pain, or his ugliness. I know that sounds harsh. I'm recalling what I thought and felt at the time. I looked down on him. A man who was

bearing a grief far beyond anything I've borne, a man who would have my heart's desire, a thing I starved after with a fanatic's glazy-eyed intensity, handed to him as neatly wrapped as a Christmas gift.

He asked if I still worked at the *World News*. I told him I did. He said it was a shame that somebody with my talents was working on such a marginal paper. This angered me a bit more than it should've, considering the fact that I agreed completely. I volunteered to him that it took true creativity to concoct such hare-brained stories as *The Boy With The Giraffe Head*. This would've angered my employers to no end, I'm sure. The truth is that I never once felt the spark of creation in the three years I worked at the *World News*. It was a burden off my shoulders when I quit, two days after the party.

Poor Winston saw that he had offended me and babbled an awkward apology. It was at that moment that I felt them, with that strange sixth sense that had entered my life ever since our first encounter.

I turned and beheld them, and though they were not in their true forms, every nuance of gesture spoke to me of their true forms and their true country.

It was strange. Though it was dark, and the shifting party lights were an imperfect illumination, I saw them clearly. I think now that this was their magic, that they wanted me to see them so clearly. They wanted me to glory and agonize over them. They wanted to teach me a lesson.

They were tall. The man was no taller than the woman. The lord no taller than the lady. They were pale. His hair was jet black, combed back and tied in a pony tail. Hers was golden, long, thick and free-flowing. He wore a blue Armani, and moved with a leonine grace. She wore a long, green summer gown. It was of a fabric gossamer and fine, and in design it was pleasing to the eye. It was to her skin beneath as offal to diamonds.

I would like to add some melodrama at this point and say that everyone in the party turned to look at them, that the band stopped playing and that you could hear the oftmentioned proverbial pin drop. But such was not the case. Everything went on pretty much as before. No one seemed to notice that something other had entered their lives. Well, no one other than Alex Winston and myself.

I turned and looked to see his reaction. His wounded troglodyte features had somehow formed into the most beatific smiles I've ever seen. He was staring at the lady. And his smile got right to the heart of things. I resented that smile. Winston with his mind so versed in the fields of science and math, probably did not have a name, as I did, for the two epiphanous beings he was staring at. But I knew his appreciation and understanding ran as deep as my own.

To my surprise they came straight towards the two of us. I thought I'd have to confront them and endure their denials. Instead, they were coming to me. I wasn't transfixed with joy, either. Mouth agape, one hand clutching empty glass, the other clenching and unclenching spasmodically, I was filled with unspeakable dread.

They reached us. The being who had taken the name

William Smith was looking straight into my eyes. I saw that his face was perfect in form, and seemed untouched by age. He smiled at me, a slow, measured smile, then he spoke.

"Henry Barnes, we must talk."

I stood speechless; my throat felt wrapped in sandpaper. I felt that if someone were to tap me on the shoulder, I would faint dead away.

"Whatever you say," I finally managed. I saw that the lady was observing Winston closely. She had the beginnings of a smile playing at the corner of her lips. Hers was a stunning, heartbreaking beauty. Her eyes were a turquoise blue; her skin was as pale as alabaster.

I felt very much like prostrating myself before them.

She spoke then and her voice was light and mellifluous, yet it reached my ears with the affect of a heavy wine.

"That would not be proper."

She moved away from Winston and eyed me, and there was humor written on her face, and it would not cruel. Yet I felt very strongly that some form of admonishment was coming.

"I have some words for you, Henry Barnes, though only a few, for it is my consort's job to speak to you." And I sensed power radiating from her, and something ancient and sad, and wise beyond human ken.

"My message to you is this: be exceedingly careful. You are at a crossroads. You can continue as you are and descend into hurt and depravity, or you can try to find a way back to what you were meant to be." She paused and looked deep into my eyes. My eyes, in turn, took in the form, the masterful work of her body, and the thoughts that filled me were of a distinctly pornographic nature.

"You see," she said, "you cannot behold beauty without wishing to possess it. And through possession comes diminishment. It is a sickness that is rampant in your world. You are not yet ready for the journey."

And then she turned from me and seemed to have no other thought of me. My stomach churned up in me, a sadness was in me, and the old familiar self-loathing filled me twice as strong as before.

She took Alex Winston's hand in her own and the smile that suffused his face was something from another world. And the lady spoke and her voice was melodious as song.

"I would very much like to dance with you, Alex Winston."

And she led him across the lawn to the dance, and my eyes followed them with a hunger not pure.

"Come, Barnes. I must speak to you. We will go inside, where we can speak undisturbed. Unlike my mate, my taste for these affairs as practiced by humans is very small."

He took me by the arm, and turned me toward the house, and when he did it was like some form of liberation. The lust had left me. My body was covered in sweat. As he led me through the house, he spoke.

"To my eyes, it is a small thing, Henry. My Lady has had that effect on many humans and on myself more than once. It is the nature of her form and enchantments. If that



were the only mark against you, perhaps we could bring you home." We entered the library as he uttered this cryptic remark. He shut the door behind us.

I saw that the library was empty of partiers. When I had arrived at the party, they stuffed the place like sardines in tin. I raised my eyebrows in a questioning manner to the lady's consort.

"I emptied it while my Lady was speaking to you. It is a relatively minor act of magic. Now-sit." He gestured to an easy chair. I sat.

He walked around, arms folded behind his back, looking up at the books, every now and then reaching out with a delicacy that was in no way effete, and touching some ornament or furniture.

"I've always loved books. In my country they come in a somewhat different form. You have an abiding love for them yourself, do you not?"

"Abiding and profound," I said, attempting to match his courtly speech, but my voice was tremulous and hesitant. He reached up with a quick gesture, catlike in its grace, and pulled a book down from one of the shelves. He brought it over, and settled himself in a chair across from me. He opened it at random, perused the words silently for a moment.

"George MacDonald," he said. "Have you ever read him?"

"You know that I have."

"Of course, of course. It would be perfectly fitting, considering your degree of obsession with my consort and I. George MacDonald sang the song of Faerie as well as anyone in your age."

"MacDonald. Tolkien. Lewis. Leguin and Lord Dunsany, I have read them all."

"Yes, yes. They have all been close to the homeland on at least one occasion. What did their words-what did their tales of Elfland do for you?"

"They filled me with a profound desire."

"A profound desire for what?"

"Transportation. I wanted to leave this hurt and broken world. I never even thought it possible until I met you. I know what you are. I know where you come from. Please take me with you."

And then there it was out in the open air, the plea I thought I'd never have a chance to make. For a moment I thought he'd ignore me or accuse me of being a lunatic. He sighed and placed the book on a table.

"You, Henry Barnes, are an interesting case. It is the first time I can remember, and the field of my memory is vast, a human knowing us for what we are and not being one of the chosen ones. If you were to be plotted and graphed as you humans are so fond of doing, you would be a statistical aberration."

"Thank you," I said.

"Ah, levity! When I least expected it. There is hope for

you yet. We've tried everything, you know. Usually we perform a simple spell of forgetfulness on those who suspect our nature, yet are not ready to cross the border. No such spells worked on you. You knew us from the start, and were not fooled by our switching of forms. For some reason you intuited the truth. You knew us as High Nobility in the land of Faerie—in the place that Earth and the other eleven sentient worlds are only shadows of. Ephel Douin—The True Country."

And when he spoke these words I wept. I wept and buried my face in my hands.

All my life I've felt something missing. Even during experiences of joy I felt: this isn't it. This isn't enough. Whatever would quench this thirst seemed just out of my reach, like something glimpsed out of the corner of the eye and not quite discerned, like a beautiful life-transforming dream that was not remembered upon awakening. Right then, in the presence of the Elf-Lord, I felt just for a moment that all this longing had been within a hair's breadth of being satiated. But the distance may as well have been a thousand miles or the constricting chains of a time already passed. For I had heard the words of the Lord and Lady and I knew it was not their intention to take me with them.

"If I am not to go with you, what are you doing here? Why are you taunting me with your presence?"

"Your being here is of your own design. I am sorry that we pain you. I think some good can come of it, though."

"What good?"

"We were sent by a shepherd to bring home with us the human, Alex Winston. His heart and soul are developed enough to survive in the True Country. Here on Earth he would die of grief. There is already much healing of him in the gentle touch of my consort."

"Why him? Why not me?"

"Your heart is too bitter. Five minutes before we entered this abode you were cursing Alex Winston for this ugliness and lack of grace. You are self-destructive and full of self-pity. Every gift you've ever had you've squandered on riotous living. The True Country would not heal a man such as you."

"How am I to live with the knowledge of this?"

"With courage and conviction as any man should. Your talents are considerable. Marshall and hone them. Go within yourself and heal what you can. And when for a season you've overcome what is most venal in you, give yourself to one who is worthy of you. There is much good a man with the conscious awareness of Ephel Douin could do."

I sighed. I felt a profound sadness. Yet there was something else growing in me, a bright, small light in the center of my being that I knew would sustain me. I would go on. I would struggle forward.

"Good. Good. You are not desolate. One last word of hope. When my consort and I contacted a shepherd..."

"Shepherd?"

"One who travels between worlds at will. You know them as teachers—Avatars."

"Guatama Buddha...Jesus Christ."

"And others more anonymous. When we spoke to this shepherd on whether it would be prudent to bring you to Ephel Douin, she said, not yet."

"Not yet?"

"Not yet."

And those two words meant everything to me. As we went back through the house to the backyard I was oblivious to greetings, indifference and hostility. I was oblivious to party chatter and female beauty. I ran the two words across my tongue, and they tasted of ambrosia and honey. I have lived on these two words ever since. They've offered me more sustenance and hope than I could possibly convey.

Outside, Winston and the Lady were holding hands. I gripped his arm and smiled at him.

"You're a damn lucky man," I said.

"It is beyond luck," he said, and my eyes took him in as he held the hand of the Lady. He seemed the most human, most handsome man I had ever seen. There was no dichotomy in the sight of them together. He was one of them.

I turned now to her. For a moment there was nothing unearthly about her. She seemed like any fresh-featured beauty next door. Then she smiled at me and I lost nearly all. Overcoming fear and wondering at the vast stupidity of it, I spoke.

"One day I will walk with you in the meadows of Ephel Douin," I said, and bowing slightly, I took her hand and raised it to my lips, and kissed it.

She looked at me, and I thought for a moment she would strike me down. Then her smile returned, and it seemed to me playful and empty of caprice.

"That is the first time a mortal ever touched me without invitation. I rather liked it." Then she leaned across and kissed me on the cheek, and she spoke in my ear in a whisper, a whisper which in all my dealings on that night was the closest I ever got to the True Country.

"It would please me, Earth brother, if one day you would walk in Ethel Douin with me."

I stared at the three of them. For the second time that evening I had an almost uncontrollable urge to drop to my knees. For the three of them—denizens of a kingdom that had pulled with violent fingers at the strings of my heart from the time I was a child.

"We must go now, Henry," said the Lord. "Stay true to what is deepest in you and we will meet again."

I bowed only slightly, for I felt then some nobility distinctly my own, and they bowed in return.

They turned from me then, and walked towards the green-vined, purple-flowered gazebo I had noticed earlier. They entered the gazebo. I saw them join hands. There was a flash of blue-white light and they were gone.

"Hank?"

I turned and saw Peter Simmons eying me with a worried expression on his face.

"Didn't you see it?"

"See what?" he asked.

I looked around the backyard. Everyone had remained oblivious to the near divine intruding on their mundane existence.

"Nothing," I said. "There was nothing here to see."

"Would you like another drink?" Peter asked. I spoke and conviction filled my words for the first time in a long time.

"NO, NO. I will not drink again. Goodnight, Peter. Thanks for the invitation."

And I turned from him and drove home.

And that is the story of the source of my partial regeneration. I have not smoked or drunk since then, and other habits of mine have become less compulsively self-destructive. I have not found religion (at least in the traditional sense), as you suggested in your letter, and I am not

a member of any twelve-step group.

Not yet. Those two words and her breath on my ear as she spoke to me, are the only moments of coherency I've needed to continue in this random, blood-drenched world.

I do not know if they will return for me on this side of the grave, and in this respect it does not matter; I will never lose the small bit of True Country that dwells in my chest. The interior alchemy is slow, and I'm still capable of grossly selfish motivations. But I have been touched and I will always allow that touch to influence any decision I make or action I undertake from this point onwards.

It's strange. When I interact with another human being and I allow what little I've seen of the True Country to enter my conscious mind, it seems for a moment as if their eyes take on the cast of the Lady's, or they move with the dignity of Alex Winston or the leonine grace of the Elf-Lord, and for a moment we bask in what is untainted, and walk through the flowered meadows and hear the strange beautiful bird choruses of Ephel Douin, the True Country.

GYPSY MELODY AND SOME LINES FROM RILKE

by David Sparenberg

green music
like green gypsies
like angels'
budding touches
sweet violins
swirl around me
high pitched
circling laughter

warm
like my woman's brown eyes
the brown earth
of a bountiful, nurturing smile

come sunlight, daylight,
make me happy
let art
be a bell of freedom
let passionate kisses
defeat
my unanswered questions
with smiling flesh
or ripe desires

cast off
old shadows, sorrow
violins, violins
do not labor

lift me rather
onto the strings of joy
into the wet spring
the moondance summer
pied
flowerbeds of life

let poetry be a bell
let us celebrate
before we fade
into the blue moods
of autumn
and the gray
nuances of twilight

ah, music, cascade-moments
eyelids
of inviting glances
like green... *Nur*

*im Raum der Ruhmung darf die
Klage
gehn, die Nympe des geweinten
Quells*

Only
in the Realm of Praising
does Lament
venture

...nicht trübt...
untroubled